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Holly, Laurel and Winterberry

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BY

ELIZABETH G. BRITTON

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E. C. B. Norton
Jan 10 1902



AMERICAN HOLL (Ilex opaca)

Photograph taken in the Fruticetum of the New York
Botanical Garden by J. A. Crawford.

Jan 70

NOTES TO

HOLLY, LAUREL AND WINTERBERRY

(With Plate 281)

As the Christmas season draws near the sale of holly, winterberry and laurel puts a damper on the spirits of those who love our native plants and makes them wonder how much longer people will encourage the destruction. All of the supply comes from wild sources and there is a feeling among too many people that this is a "free country" and that vacant lands belong to the people; so they have no hesitation in invading any open or even unprotected property, and carry off loads of holly, laurel and evergreens! It will be many years before this vandalism can be checked. Just think of being receivers of stolen goods, at Christmas time!

It is with great pleasure that we are able to announce that the Garden Club of America, the New England Society for the Preservation of Native Plants and the Wild Flower Preservation Society, are all combining to bring about a better public sentiment with regard to the holly and laurel. The Garden Club of America is advocating the planting of holly and creating a demand among nurserymen for locally-grown plants; because it is a well-known fact that the holly, like many of the broad-leaved evergreens, has some races which are less hardy than others, it seems advisable to secure plants proved to be hardy in the region in which they are to be grown.

While English holly will stand clipping very well, and is extensively used for topiary work in England, those who collect the American holly for commercial purposes destroy and mutilate the trees so badly that it has disappeared almost entirely from the vicinity of all large cities! On Staten Island there are only

a few trees left, of the many that used to be found on the hill near Richmond and in the cedars which formerly occupied the present site of Midland Beach. It is known definitely on Long Island, according to Mr. Norman Taylor, from Rockaway, Hewlett, Fire Island Beach, Wading River, Smithtown, Amagansett, Montauk and doubtless at other places, but reports have been recently received that in winter time, when the owners are not there to guard them, the trees are often cut down or mutilated beyond recovery! It can be obtained from the Hicks Nurseries at Westbury, Long Island, and they have several hundred plants, two to three feet high, at four dollars each or thirty dollars for ten. According to Britton and Brown, *Ilex opaca* Ait. is said to grow "in moist woods" from Southern Maine to Florida, west to Pennsylvania, Missouri and Texas, and to be most abundant near the coast, though known to occur sparingly on Table Rock, North Carolina, at three thousand feet elevation. According to reports, the largest commercial supplies are now coming from Texas, and are being shipped all over the country by the car-load, in such large quantities that it is only a question of a few years when this tree will be almost or quite locally exterminated.

Professor M. T. Cook states that in Ocean and Monmouth County, New Jersey, holly is still found wild in sufficient quantity to make it worth while for local residents to supply it in small quantities to local dealers, but the State Department of Conservation assures us that at Mount Holly, where it used to be abundant, only a few stunted trees remain. A nurseryman, who propagates and sells them, is handicapped by the quarantine law against the Japanese beetle. There are a few fine trees in cultivation of both the American and English holly at Burlington and Princeton, New Jersey, and perhaps there may still be some wild trees back of Sandy Hook and in the Highlands, where we know of a few belonging to the Misses Haynes. Dr. Harshberger, whose interest in historical trees is well-known, states that in Bucks and Delaware Counties, Pennsylvania, and in New Castle County, Delaware, there are still some wild plants at a number of places. Mr. E. Morell of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, who conducts a "Holly Tree Nursery" at Southern Pines, North Carolina, finds that seedling holly trees for growing in the northeastern States must be propagated from

seeds from northern localities. The young trees grown from seeds from southern localities are not hardly when set out at the North.

In Rhodora¹ the range of the holly in New England is indicated. The old Essex County station at Cape Ann has been gone since 1880, "but in some localities it is still abundant and fruits well; whereas in other localities there are only scattering and badly-hacked trees." It occurs also on Cape Cod and sparingly on Nantucket and in the southeastern part of Rhode Island, but in Connecticut seems to be lacking. Dr. Nichols says: "There is no question in my mind but that the holly was formerly native in Connecticut, but while I have been on the lookout for it for many years and have talked with various of the Connecticut botanists who should be in position to know, I have yet to get track of a single living wild specimen, growing either native or as an escape."

In Maryland and Virginia the holly and laurel are gathered and brought in to market, largely by the negro population, and Maryland is the first State to recognize the danger and pass a law which imposes a fine of from five dollars to twenty-five dollars or imprisonment for cutting laurel, holly or Christmas trees from any private land, without the consent of the owner.

The laurel is used in summer as well as in winter and the wild cherry is a good substitute for decorating fruit-stands, etc.

The New England Society for the Protection of Native Plants has sent out a circular letter to all the churches urging them not to use the mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) for their Christmas decoration and suggesting as a substitute garlands of white pine, as the timber will be benefited by having the lower branches cut. Unfortunately the gum that is exuded from the pine is a serious drawback to its becoming a popular substitute for the laurel but perhaps the hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) would be better.

The winterberry, also of the holly family, (*Ilex glabra*) has approximately the same range though extending farther inland away from the coast. It is known in Nova Scotia in the vicinity of Halifax, then skips two hundred and seventy-five miles to Cape Ann, Massachusetts, and ranges southward to Florida and

¹ Rhodora 16: 163-165. 1914 and 21: 126. 1919.

Louisiana. It also has suffered a good deal from vandalism, though it is not collected in such large quantities as the holly. It too is difficult to germinate, is sown by birds and prefers moist sandy localities.

In a leaflet on "Our Christmas Greens" by Beatrix Farrand, the well known garden expert, it is stated that a commercial box of holly, such as we see standing outside of the florists and grocer's shops, "contains a minimum of six hundred years of growth and that one poor yard of laurel-roping uses up at least twenty years of growth! As all of this comes from wild sources and often without the permission of the owner, it is only too true that our woodlands are being butchered to make a Christmas Holiday, and that we are each of us directly responsible for our share of this destruction." Mrs. Farrand suggests that we use more tubbed or potted trees of holly and there are a number of substitutes which may be had by the discriminating. Small evergreens in pots, *Ardisia crenata*, with its bright red berries, the Jerusalem cherry, *Solanum Pseudocapsicum*, dwarf orange trees and the *Poinsettia* or mexican flame-leaf are all excellent substitutes and artificial imitations of the last may be had in a variety of styles and prices, as it is beginning to be recognized as the best and showiest "Christmas Flower." In Florida at Miami, where it grows out-of-doors, it is a most gorgeous Christmas tree.

There are a number of other species of the spurge family, *Euphorbiaceae*, which would be welcome and decorative. *Euphorbia heterophylla*,* the annual poinsettia, is easily grown from seeds and as a pot-plant. The scarlet-plume (*E. fulgens*), is one of the most graceful of plants, and *Adenorima punicea* or *Euphorbiodendron* would be a most popular addition if it could be introduced from Jamaica where it grows wild. Wreaths of immortelles or wood fiber make very attractive decorations. Their too great brilliancy may be toned down by the addition of some artificial leaves and holly berries.

Holly seeds are said to be difficult to germinate and to require three to four years. We have some plants over a foot high grown from seed sown in 1920. It seems likely that the warmth of the digestive tract of birds is necessary to hasten germination,

* Addisonia 4: 77-78. Dec. 1919. Plate 159.

for in the New Forest in England holly trees have sprung up all around the base of the fine old beech trees, evidently sown by birds.

In the New York Botanical Garden we have tried planting holly, both American and English, without much success. One fine tree, over ten feet high, from the Andora Nurseries of Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, was planted in 1906; it has escaped injury so far, though a few sprays were taken last year. Holly is evidently slow in growth, but will stand judicious pruning, but it is particular about soil and exposure, so that it is advisable to study its habits and try to find suitable locations for planting, else the result will be disappointing. It is also to be remembered that holly is polygamous, often quite dioicous and that the staminate trees do not bear fruit, so it would be wise to plant several in a group.

E. G. BRITTON

MARYLAND STATE LAWS

\$25 Fine for Picking Wild Flowers

A *Maryland State Law* imposes a fine of \$5 to \$25; or imprisonment, or both, if you remove, take, cut, break, injure, or destroy any tree, shrub, flower, vine, moss or turf, or attempt to do so, without the personal direction or written consent of the owner.

\$25 Fine

Or 90 Days Imprisonment or Both

for taking Christmas trees, evergreen, holly or mistletoe from these woods without the written consent or personal direction of the owner. Maryland State Laws, Chapter 179, Section 1.



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